

## Message Text

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 1505

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SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION - AN ANALYSIS

REF: (A) STATE 62008; (B) BEIRUT 1102; (C) TEL AVIV 2244

1. SUMMARY: SOUTH LEBANON TODAY FEATURES THREE CONFLICTING COALITIONS: 1) CHRISTIANS AND ISRAELIS; 2) PALESTINIAN MODERATES AND SYRIANS; 3) PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS AND ASSORTED ALLIES. THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES (LCF), WITH ISRAELI BACKING AND ORCHESTRATION, HAVE BEEN PURSUING AN OFFENSIVE STRATEGY TO CREATE A CORDON SANITAIRE AND PERHAPS THEREAFTER TO UNDER TAKE A  
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GENERAL DRIVE TO THE NORTH TO WIPE OUT THE PALESTINIANS ALTOGETHER. THE PALESTINIAN MODERATES, WITH AT LEAST INDIRECT SYRIAN SUPPORT THROUGH SAIQA, ARE SEEKING TO PRESERVE A ZONE OF FREE OPERATIONS FOR THEMSELVES. BOTH COALITIONS ARE SEEKING TO DESTROY THE PALESTINIAN REJECTIONIST GROUPING AS A MILITARY ENTITY. THE LIMITS OF INVOLVEMENT OF SYRIAN REGULAR FORCES IN THE SOUTH HAVE ALREADY BEEN DRAWN. THE LIMITS OF THE ISRAELI-BACKED CHRISTIAN OFFENSIVE HAVE NOT BEEN DEFINED AND COULD THREATEN THE ENTIRE TENUOUS STRUCTURE OF PEACE IN LEBANON, BOTH THROUGH ITS INTERNATIONAL AND ITS DOMESTIC REPER-

CUSSIONS. THE GOL IS BEING HAMPERED IN ITS EFFORTS TO REUNITE LEBANON BY THE ISRAELI SUPPORT OF THE CHRISTIANS, AND HAS BEEN UNDERMINED BY ISRAELI REFUSAL TO PERMIT ASF FORCES TO MOVE TO THE NABATIYAH AREA. ISRAELI-CHRISTIAN STRATEGY IS PERHAPS CONSIDERED TO SUPPORT EFFORTS TO CREATE CONDITIONS FAVORABLE TO AN OVERALL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT, BUT IN SHORT TERM LOOKS DESTRUCTIVE OF US POLICY GOAL OF A PEACEFUL, STABLE, UNITED LEBANON. WE SHOULD URGE CAUTION ON THE ISRAELIS. END SUMMARY.

2. FORCES IN THE SOUTH. ACCORDING TO OUR BEST INFORMATION, FOLLOWING ARE THE STRENGTHS, LOCATIONS, AND OBJECTIVES OF THE VARIOUS ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN SOUTH LEBANON:

A. LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES (LCF). TOTAL AT LEAST 1500 FIGHTERS, MADE UP OF SOME 850 SOLDIERS FROM GEN. HANNA SAID'S CHRISTIAN FACTION OF THE LEBANESE ARMY AND FORMER ARMY PERSONNEL, ABOUT 350 PNL AND KATAEB MILITIAMEN FROM NORTH OF BEIRUT AND ABOUT 300 LOCAL MILITIAMEN. A RECENT REPORT FROM PHALANGE SOURCES WHICH WE BELIEVE IS HIGH PUTS THE TOTAL AT SOME 2,500, INCLUDING 1200 REGULAR ARMY, 400 PHALANGE MILITIA, 200 NLP MILITIA, 100 GUARDIANS OF THE CEDAR, AND 500 ASSORTED ORTHERS.

THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED THEMSELVES IN TWO AREA:

1) ALONG THE SOUTHERN LEBANESE-ISRAELI BORDER, FROM AYN  
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IBIL, JUST WEST OF BINT JUBAYL, TO ALMA ASH SHAAB. ON THEIR EASTERN FLANK, THEY ARE FACED BY THE PALESTINIAN STRONGPOINT OF BINT JUBAYL, AND, TO THE WEST, THEY DO NOT CONTROL THE MEDITERRANEAN COASTAL VILLAGE OF NAKOURA.

2) THE AREA BETWEEN THE LITANI AND HASBANI RIVERS CENTERED UPON A TRIANGLE AROUND MARJAYUN, QULAYAH TO THE SOUTH-WEST AND KHIAM TO THE SOUTHEAST. WITHIN THIS AREA, THE LCF HAS CONCENTRATED ITS TROOPS, TANKS, AND ARTILLERY, PARTICULARLY AT QULAYAH.

B. THE GAP BETWEEN THE TWO LCF ZONES ALONG THE HIGH GROUND TO THE WEST OF THE JORDAN HEADWATERS IS WELL COVERED BY ISRAELI BORDER POINTS WHICH DOMINATE THE TERRAIN AND BY OCCASIONAL ISRAELI PATROL ACTIVITY IN THE LEBANESE BORDER VILLAGES. NEVERTHELESS, THE LCF APPARENTLY HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO ATTEMPT TO (1) LINK THE TWO AREAS AND TO SEIZE THE PALESTINIAN STRONGHOLD OF BINT JUBAYL, AND (2) EXTEND ITS ZONE OF CONTROL TO THE SEA AT NAKOURA, GIVING THE LCF THE CAPABILITY TO RESUPPLY BY SEA, FROM THE MT. LEBANON HEARTLAND. (TO THE NORTHEAST, THE LCF REPORT-EDLY WANTS TO ESTABLISH A SECURE LINK NORTHWARD TO THE CHRISTIAN CITY OF JEZZINE AND ONWARD TO THE MARONITE MOUNT LEBANON HEART-LAND BUT WE DOUBT THIS IS FEASIBLE.) WHEN STEPS (1) AND (2) ARE ACCOMPLISHED, THE LCF WILL HAVE ESTABLISHED A ZONE OF CONTROL

10-15 KILOMETERS WIDE ALONG THE ISRAELI BORDER ALL THE WAY FROM THE SEA TO THE FOOTHILLS OF MT. HERMON IN THE ARKOU BM

. THE ISRAELIS. ISRAEL PROVIDES THE LCF: 1) SANCTUARY AND POTENTIAL REINFORCEMENT IF NEEDED; 2) SECURE LINES OF COMMUNICATION, BY SEA, TO THE MT. LEBANON HEARTLAND; 3) TRAINING; 4) LOGISTIC SUPPORT; 5) COMMUNICATIONS; 6) INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT; 7) OCCASIONAL DIRECT ARTILLERY SUPPORT IN SELECTED LOCATIONS; 8) OCCASIONAL GROUND PATROLLING SUPPORT; 9) ECONOMIC AND HUMANITARIAN INDUCEMENTS AND MILITARY THREATS TO LOCAL VILLAGERS TO COOPERATE WITH THE LCF. THE ISRAELIS ARE IN A POSITION TO INFLUENCE THE THRUST AND TEMPO OF THE UNFOLDING LCF STRATEGY.

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D. LOCAL SHIA. THE NATIVE POPULATION OF THE SOUTH IS PREDOMINANTLY SHIA. MANY OF THEM IMMIGRATED TO BEIRUT OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, BUT AFTER THE FALL OF TEL AZ ZAATAR AND NABAA IN MID-1976, MANY RETURNED TO THE SOUTH. WITH THE RECENT INCREASE IN FIGHTING IN THE SOUTH, PERHAPS 50,000 SOUTHERN SHIA HAVE ONCE AGAIN RETURNED TO THE BEIRUT AREA. ONE OF THEIR LEADERS, THE IMAM MOUSSA SADR, HAS ATTEMPTED WITH LITTLE SUCCESS TO ORGANIZE SOME LOCAL SHIA MILITIA IN THE SOUTH, BUT THE BASIS SHIA POSITION IS A PASSIVE ONE OF TRYING TO STAY OUT OF THE WAY OF THE ACTIVE COMBATANTS.

E. SYRIANS. THE REGULAR SYRIAN ARMY IS STAYING NORTH OF THE "RED LINE," PRESUMABLY SOME TEN KILOMETERS NORTH OF AND PARALLEL TO THE LITANI RIVER.

F. PALESTINIAN MODERATES. FATAH, SAIQA, THE PDLFP AND THE AHMED JABRIL WING OF THE PFLP/GC ARE DISPERSED THROUGHOUT A BROAD AREA NORTH AND NORTHWEST OF THE LCF FORCES AND SOUTH OF THE "RED LINE." THEIR TOTAL ARMED STRENGTH IS ABOUT 4,000. THEY ARE SUPPORTED BY PERHAPS AS MANY AS 2,500 SYRIAN SOLDIERS IN SAIQA UNIFORMS. THE MODERATES ARE ASSERTING THEIR RIGHT UNDER THEIR INTERPRETATION OF THE 1969 CAIRO ACCORDS TO OPERATE FREELY THROUGHOUT THIS AREA. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT TO REMAIN IN THIS AREA BECAUSE THE ONLY OTHER PLACE LEFT FOR THEM TO GO IS THE ARKOU BM, WHICH DENIES THEM THE OPTION OF COMMANDO ACTION AGAINST ISRAEL. AS A SECONDARY OBJECTIVE, THEY ARE TRYING TO BRING THE PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS UNDER CONTROL.

G. REJECTIONISTS. ELEMENTS OF THE PFLP, THE ALF AND THE REJECTIONIST WING OF THE PFLP/GC, SUPPORTED BY SOME LOCAL LEBANESE COMMUNIST MILITIA, LEFTISH REMNANTS OF THE FAST-DISAPPEARING LAA, IRAQI REMNANTS AND A FEW INTERNATIONAL LEFTISTS ARE SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THE PALESTINIAN ZONE BETWEEN THE LCF AND THE RED LINE. THEIR TOTAL ARMED STRENGTH IS A MAXIMUM OF 3,000. TOGETHER WITH THE PALESTINIAN MODERATES, THEY

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CONTINUE TO RESIST CHRISTIAN/ISRAELI PRESSURE FROM THE SOUTH, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY RESISTING ABSORPTION BY THE MODERATE ORGANIZATIONS. LIKE THE MODERATES, THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL.

3. TWO STRATEGIES. WITHIN THE MULTIPLICITY OF INVOLVED ELEMENTS IN THE SOUTH, THERE ARE TWO ACTIVE STRATEGIES; 1) AN ISRAELI/CHRISTIAN EFFORT TO CREATE AND CONSOLIDATE A CHRISTIAN BUFFER ZONE ALONG THE ISRAELI BORDER AND THEN, PERHAPS, TO ELIMINATE THE PALESTINIAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE SOUTH; 2) A DEFENSIVE SYRIAN/PALESTINIAN MODERATE EFFORT TO MAINTAIN A DEGREE OF FREEDOM OF MILITARY ACTION FOR THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTH. THESE TWO COALITIONS, WHILE FIGHTING EACH OTHER, SHARE THE COMMON GOAL OF BRINGING TO HEEL THE PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS AND THEIR LEBANESE AND FOREIGN SUPPORTERS. IN A REAL SENSE, IT IS A THREE-SIDED WAR, WITH EACH SIDE SHARING AN INTEREST WITH EACH OF THE OTHER TWO SIDES IN THE DESTRUCTION OR AT LEAST CONTAINMENT OF THE THIRD.

4. THE LIMITS OF INTERVENTION: SYRIAN REGULAR ARMY INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOUTH HAS BEEN HALTED ALONG A LINE NORTH OF NABATIYAH, FOLLOWING ISRAELI OBJECTIONS TO THEIR PRESENCE NEAR THAT TOWN LAST JANUARY. THERE HAS BEEN NO SIMILAR DELIMITATION OF CHRISTIAN-ISRAELI DISPOSITIONS. IF THE LEBANESE FORCES RESTRICT THEMSELVES TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A 10-15 KILOMETER WIDE CORDON SANITAIRE ALONG THE BORDER, THEY MAY GET AWAY WITH IT (ALTHOUGH THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF PALESTINIAN ALARM AT THEIR CAPTURE OF AT-TAYYIBAH AND OTHER POINTS LAST WEEK AND WE SEEM TO BE WITNESSING A COUNTEROFFENSIVE). A MORE AMBITIOUS STRATEGY TO EXTEND LEBANESE FORCES CONTROL NORTHWARD TO THE LITANI AND TYRE (A STRATEGY WHICH OUR CHAMOUNIST SOURCES CONTINUALLY TELL US IS TO BE IMPLEMENTED EVEN THOUGH WE DO NOT THINK THEY HAVE THE WHEREWITHAL TO DO IT) WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY RUN UP AGAINST STIFFER PALESTINIAN APPPOSITION THAN THAT REGISTERED TO DATE. SUCH A MOVE TO THE NORTH WOULD  
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BE PERCEIVED BY BOTH MODERATE AND EXTREMIST PALESTINIANS AS A THREAT TO THEIR POLITICAL AND MILITARY EXISTENCE AND WE WOULD EXPECT BOTH FACTIONS, AND NOT JUST THE REJECTIONISTS, TO START FIGHTING SERIOUSLY. WHATEVER ITS OPPOSITION TO THE REJECTIONISTS, FATAH WOULD FIND IT VERY HARD TO STAND BY IDLY AND IT IS OUR CONSIDERED OPINION THAT THEY WOULD WADE IN. THIS WOULD MEAN QUITE A DIFFERENT SORT OF WAR FROM THAT WHICH HAS BEEN WAGED TO DATE, BECAUSE THE PALESTINIANS HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO CLEAN UP ON THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS, AND TO FACE THE ISRAELIS WITH THE ALTERNATIVE OF EITHER INTERVENING OR ABANDONING THEIR PROTEGES. HOW FAR THE PALESTINIANS WOULD PRESS IS SOMETHING WE CANNOT ANSWER, BUT IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO COUNT ON THEIR RESTRAINT.

5. WHAT SYRIA WOULD DO IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES IS NOT CLEAR TO US. DEPARTMENTAL ASSURANCES TO THE CONTRARY NOTWITHSTANDING, WE BELIEVE THE SYRIANS WOULD FIND THEMSELVES IN A REAL DILEMMA IF THE LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES BEGAN MOVING NORTH AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS. THE LEAST THEY WOULD DO WOULD BE TO FACILITATE WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION RESUPPLY TO THE PALESTINIANS. (WE ARE NOW TOLD THAT THEY GAVE ARTILLERY SUPPORT TO FATAH AT TAIBEH. THEY WOULD PERHAPS INCREASE USE OF SAIQA TO SUPPORT THEM MORE DIRECTLY. IN EXTREMIS, I.E., IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THE CHRIST- IANS WERE LIQUIDATING THE REJECTIONISTS NORTH OF THE SECURITY ZONE, THEY MIGHT FEEL OBLIGED TO INTERVENE DIRECTLY WITH REGULAR TROOPS.

6. WE HOPE THE AFFAIR NEVER GETS THIS FAR, BUT NO ONE WOULD EVER HAVE THOUGHT THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR WAS GOING AS FAR AS IT DID. TOO MANY LEBANESE HAVE SEEN TOO MANY WESTERN MOVIES.

7. THE GOL'S POSITION IN ALL THIS HAS BEEN EQUIVOCAL. SARKIS HAS FOLLOWED A POLICY OF IMMOBILISM BECAUSE HE HAS HAD NO CHOICE. HE HAS NO ARMY TO IMPOSE A PEACE OF HIS OWN, THE ISRAELIS HAVE DENIED HIM THE USE OF THE ASF IN THE SOUTH, AND HIS ARAB BRETHERN HAVE APPARENTLY REFUSED TO LET HIM  
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EXPLORE FURTHER THE POSSIBILITY OF USING A UN FORCE. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES ALL THE GOL CAN DO IS LOOK CONCERNED AND HOPE THAT A STABLE SECURITY ZONE CAN BE ESTABLISHED QUICKLY.

8. US POLICY. WHILE CREATION OF A BUFFER ZONE ALONG THE BORDER MAY DIMINISH RISKS OF CONFRONTATION, IT ALSO CAUSES SEVERE POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN LEBANON AND AFFECTS THAT COUNTRY'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND UNITY. THIS POST CONTINUES TO BELIEVE WE SHOULD (A) CAUTION THE ISRAELIS THEY ARE PLAYING WITH FIRE, (B) MAKE IT EXPLICIT THAT THEY DO NOT ENJOY OUR SUPPORT FOR THEIR LEBANON OPERATION, AND (C) URGE THEM NOT TO EGG ON THE CHRISTIANS. (INDEED, JUDGING BY RECENT REPORTS FROM THAT AREA, THE SYRIAN REACTION WE HAVE FEARED MAY ALREADY HAVE BEGUN.)

9. A DEPUTY FROM THE SOUTH SAID TO ME ONE DAY, "BIDDHON YAAKLU AL-'AINAB AW YADRUBU AN-NATUR?" MEANING, "DO THEY (THE ISRAELIS) WANT TO EAT THE GRAPES OR BEAT THE WATCHMAN?" THE IMPLICATION IS THAT IF THINGS HALT ABOUT WHERE THEY ARE, THERE MAY BE SOME BENEFIT FOR BOTH ISRAELIS AND LEBANON, I.E., THEY WILL EAT THE GRAPES. BUT TO CONTINUE BEYOND THAT POINT IS TO BEAT THE WATCHMAN, AND GET NO GRAPES.  
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